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ABSTRACT

This report examines objectives for geographic education recently developed by 6 of the 50 states. The objectives reviewed come from the states of North Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Wisconsin. These states were selected because there was evidence of recent and intensive effort to develop relatively explicit objectives for geographic education. Therefore, an analysis of these objectives should provide some insight into current ideas about geography in the schools. Only knowledge and skill objectives were analyzed. Two limitations to the study are acknowledged: (1) data from the six states, selected as they were, do not permit generalizations about all the states and (2) some geographers would disagree with the content classification scheme used in the study. Findings and conclusions include the following. Differences among the objectives for geographic education in the six states are striking. For example, more than half of the objectives from Utah and Virginia fall into the information processing category, while less than 10% of South Dakota's are so classified. Twenty-five percent of Wisconsin's objectives concern earth science/physical environment, but in North Carolina that category contains only one percent of the objectives. Overall, judging by these objectives, precollegiate geographic education is a composite of information processing, area studies, and to a lesser extent, man-land geography. Much less attention is given to physical geography, problem solving, and the spatial tradition. It is concluded that precollegiate geographic education lacks suitable guidelines and criteria for developing and evaluating objectives. (RM)

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OBJECTIVES FOR GEOGRAPHIC EDUCATION: RESULTS OF A STATE BY STATE SURVEY

by

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers (San Antonio, TX, April, 1982).

OBJECTIVES FOR GEOGRAPHIC EDUCATION:

RESULTS OF A STATE BY STATE SURVEY[1]

by

Gary Manson

This is the third in a series of reports on the status of geography in the elementary and secondary schools of the United States. Each report deals with different topics because ascertaining the status of precollegiate geographic education, like ascertaining the conditions of one's health, requires multiple measures. The first report discussed enrollment, achievement and curriculum patterns, while the second dealt with geography textbooks, Grades 7-12.[1] This report examines objectives for geographic education recently developed by six of the fifty states.[2]

Defined in behavioral terms, educational objectives are statements of what it is that learners should be able to do after instruction which they were unable to do previously. Necessarily, an objective contains a "process" element, which indicates the action to be performed by the learner, and a "content" element, which identifies the object of the action. Examples of process are "draw", "remember" and "explain"; examples of content are "a map", "the largest city", and "location rent". Objectives are distinguished from goals in that goals stipulate broad, long-range purposes of a curricular area, so they are stated more

broadly than objectives. "Acquire the knowledge...needed to understand the spatial organization of American society" is an example of a goal. All documents examined for this study generally conformed to this distinction between goals and objectives.[3]

Method

The objectives reviewed for this study come from the states of North Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Virginia and Wisconsin. These states were selected because there was evidence of recent and intensive effort to develop relatively explicit objectives for geographic education, therefore, an analysis of these objectives should provide some insight into current ideas about geography in the schools. Each of these states classified their objectives into the conventional categories of knowledge objectives, skill objectives and attitudinal objectives, although different nomenclature was sometimes used. Virtually no attitudinal objectives were directly related to geography so only knowledge and skill objectives were analyzed.

Categories for the knowledge objectives were constructed from Pattison's 'four traditions' and Haggett's 'ecological and spatial systems' views of the geographic discipline.[4] (Figure 1) The 'earth science/environmental' category includes objectives dealing with the physical environment, especially the atmosphere,

FIGURE 1

CLASSIFYING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS OBJECTIVES
FOR GEOGRAPHIC EDUCATION

CATEGORY	EXAMPLES
EARTH SCIENCE/ENVIRONMENTAL	"EXPLAIN WHAT CAUSES SEASONS." "EXPLAIN AND DESCRIBE THE PRESENT LOCATION OF CONTINENTAL LANDMASSES THROUGH AN ANALYSIS OF THEIR EVOLUTION FROM A SINGLE LANDMASS."
MAN-LAND/ECOLOGICAL	"TELL HOW CLIMATE AFFECTS THE WAY WE DRESS AND LIVE." "SUPPORT OR DISPROVE A GIVEN STATEMENT OF GEOGRAPHIC DETERMINISM."
AREA STUDIES/REGIONAL MOSAIC	"LIST THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE 'LESS DEVELOPED' NATIONS OF THE WORLD." "LOCATE ON A PHYSICAL/RESOURCE MAP OF AFRICA AREAS BEST SUITED FOR AGRICULTURE."
SPATIAL ORGANIZATION/ REGIONAL HIERARCHY	"APPLY CENTRAL PLACE THEORY TO THE URBAN PATTERN OF THE STATE." "EXPLAIN THE INFLUENCE OF LARGE CITIES ON RURAL AREAS."
INFORMATION PROCESSING	"IDENTIFY DISTORTIONS ON . . . MAP PROJECTIONS." "MAKE SKETCH MAPS OF PLACES STUDIED."
PROBLEM SOLVING	"SUGGEST A SOLUTION TO A GIVEN PROBLEM OF ENVIRONMENTAL ABUSE." "DESCRIBE THE EFFECTS OF MALNUTRITION ON THE POPULATION OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES."

the hydrosphere and earth-sun relations. The 'man-land/ecological' response category contains objectives concerned with people-environment interactions. Objectives focused on the character and differentiation of places were placed in the 'area studies/regional mosaic' category, while objectives concerned with locational analysis were included in the 'spatial/regional hierarchy' category. Two categories for skill-related objectives were utilized: those related to obtaining, organizing, reading or interpreting information were classified as 'information-processing' objectives; and those involving issues such as resource depletion and regional development were labelled 'problem solving' objectives. Objectives concerned with generalized problem solving skills were not included.

Findings

The number of objectives for geographic education prepared by each state ranged from 18 to 160. States opting for a specific grade-by-grade approach generated more objectives than states preparing broader midpoint and exiting objectives. For this reason, percentages are used to make the comparisons shown in Figure 2. Care should be taken with the interpretation of percentages for the small

FIGURE 2

PERCENTAGE OF OBJECTIVES BY TYPE AND STATE

Objective Category	Carolina (N=109)	Dakota (N=38)	Texas (N=18)	Utah (N=160)	Virginia (N=79)	Wisconsin (N=68)	Total (N=472)
Earth Science	1%	8%	6%	19%	9%	25%	12%
Man-land	28%	45%	27%	9%	16%	6%	18%
Area studies	39%	26%	49%	17%	23%	38%	28%
Spatial	0%	0%	6%	1%	0%	15%	3%
Information processing	19%	8%	12%	52%	52%	12%	34%
Problem solving	13%	13%	0%	1%	0%	4%	5%

N's associated with South Dakota and Texas; it should be noted that Texas has prepared extensive, subordinant statements containing hundreds of objectives for geographic education.

Differences among the objectives for geographic education in these six states are striking. More than half of the objectives from Utah and Virginia fall into the information processing category, while less than 10% of South Dakota's are so classified. 25% of Wisconsin's objectives concern earth science/physical environment, but in North Carolina that category contains only 1% of the objectives. Yet, the "big" picture seems clear: judging by these objectives, precollegiate geographic education is a composite of information processing, area studies and, to a lesser extent, man-land geography. Much less attention is given to physical geography, problem solving and the spatial tradition.

Three of the states considered in this study classify their objectives by discipline. By comparing the percentage of objectives allocated to each discipline, we can gain some idea about the relative inportance assigned to the various disciplines by the developers of the objectives. This assumes, of course, that the number of objectives provided

for each discipline is a valid index of its perceived importance and that the developers classified the objectives properly. Figure 3 suggests that psychology, anthropology and sociology are the least important social science disciplines in precollegiate education, while history and political science are the most important. Geography ranks third in importance in North Carolina, only slightly ahead of economics; in Texas and Utah, geography ranks even lower.

Limitations and Conclusions

Any discussion of the findings of this study should begin with an acknowledgment of two principal limitations before we turn to some tentative conclusions. First, data from these six states, selected as they were, do not permit generalizations about all the states. Some states did not respond to repeated requests for statements of philosophy, rationale and objectives for the social studies, perhaps because many states do not have such documents.[5] Of the states which did supply curriculum documents, only the six considered in this study had adequately formulated objectives for geographic education: in this respect, they must be regarded as leaders insofar as state-level curriculum development is concerned.

FIGURE 3

PERCENTAGE OF ALL SOCIAL STUDIES
OBJECTIVES BY STATE AND DISCIPLINE

	State		
Discipline	North Carolina	Texas	Utah
Anthropology	2%	6%	10%
Economics	17%	26%	17%
Geography	18%	14%	10%
History	32%	26%	20%
Political Science	24%	24%	23%
Psychology	0%	2%	6%
Sociology	7%	3%	14%

Second, we should recongize that some geographers would disagree with the content classification scheme used in this study, preferring other frameworks instead. And even if the present framework were acceptable, no doubt there would be disagreement about the classification of certain objectives. But underlying this limitation is a more serious problem which is beyond the scope of this research, i.e. the lack of an agreed-upon structure for the geographic discipline which is suitable for pedagogic purposes. One group of curriculum specialists has said: "At times, it would be easy to conclude that geography and history have no agreed-upon conceptual base. Unlike the situation in science and mathematics, it is not possible to work backwards from some established theory in geography to identify such critical components as generalizations, individual concepts and skills."[6] A related problem concerns the lack of consensus about an appropriate framework for skills. Most geographic educators recognize that more precise and detailed descriptions of skills are needed to guide instruction and evaluation, but here, too, there is little agreement among geographers.

Despite these and other limitations, certain conclusions can be drawn. First, geographers should realize

that their discipline has not disappeared from the precollegiate curriculum. All states included in this study provided some objectives for geographic education. However, geographers should be concerned about the priority given to geographic education; it appears that geography is "losing out" to other disciplines, especially economics.[7] Second, geographers should recognize that geographic education at the precollegiate level lacks suitable guidelines and criteria for developing and evaluating objectives. Many objectives seem to have originated in the outmoded perceptions of geography held by nongeographers; how else can one explain the virtual absence of the spatial tradition? Where geographers have participated in the formulation of objectives, a more balanced and coherent view of the discipline emerges, but no such view can even by glimpsed by looking across the states; instead, one sees only confusion.

Objectives are more than an indicator of the status of geographic education. They tell us what it is that policy makers believe to be important and necessary outcomes of the educational process; as such, educational objectives are political statements. Objectives also influence the selection of curriculum content and teaching-learning

practices, although it must be acknowledged that teachers sometimes ignore statements of educational objectives when they plan and conduct instruction.[8] Nevertheless, objectives can control and prescribe what will be taught and how it will be learned, especially when they are linked to a state-wide assessment program. For these reasons, geographers should be concerned about the discussion of objectives presented elsewhere in this session.

FOOTNOTES

1. These reports are summarized in Gary Manson, "Notes on the Status of Geography in American Schools, "Journal of Geography, in press.

2. Competence Goals and Peformance Indicators, K-12: Social Studies (Raleigh, North Carolina; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, undates); South Dakota Social Studies Curriculum Guide K-12: 1981; Social Studies Subgoals and Suggested Essential Student Objectives (Austin, Texas: Texas Education Agency, 1980); A Course of Study for Social Studies in Utah: Elementary/Secondary (Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah State Office of Education, 1981); A Framework: The Social Studies Program in Virginia's Public Schools, K-12)(Richmond, Virginia: Department of Education, undated); and Goal Descriptions for Geographic Literacy (Madison, Wisconsin: Department of Public Instruction, undated).

3. For further discussion, see Gary Manson, "Classroom Questioning for Geography Teachers," Journal of Geography 72(1973):24-30; Ambrose A. Clegg, "Developing and Using Behavioral Objectives in Geography," in Focus on Geography: Key Concepts and Teaching Strategies, ed. Phillip Bacon (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies,

1970); and Dana G. Kurfman, "Educational Developments Useful in Geographic Education," in Evaluation in Geographic Education, ed. Dana G. Kurfman, (Belmont, Calif.: Fearon Publishers, 1970).

4. William D. Pattison, "The Four Traditions of Geography," Journal of Geography 63(1964):211-216; and Peter Haggett, Geography: A Modern Synthesis, Third Edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).
5. Jerry R. Moore, "Social Studies Assessment: Current Practices" in Criterion-Referenced Testing for the Social Studies eds. Paul L. Williams and Jerry R. Moore (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1980).
6. Floyd Robinson and Floyd White, "Report of the Complex Intellectual Performance Group," unpublished manuscript, May 1979, pp. 5-6.
7. "Economic Education on the Upswing," Social Education 46(1982):32-35.
8. Gail McCutcheon, "Elementary School Teacher's Planning for Social Studies and Other Subjects," Theory and Research in Social Education 9(1981):46